IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

NICOLE BRISCOE 5317 Laurens Street	:
	:
Philadelphia, PA 19144	: CIVIL ACTION
Plaintiff,	: : No
v.	:
SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY Office of General Counsel 1234 Market Street 5 th Floor Philadelphia, PA 19107	: JURY TRIAL DEMANDED : : : :
Defendant.	: :

CIVIL ACTION COMPLAINT

Plaintiff, by and through her undersigned counsel, hereby avers as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. This action has been initiated by Nicole Briscoe (hereinafter referred to as "Plaintiff," unless indicated otherwise) against the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (hereinafter referred to as "Defendant" or "SEPTA" unless indicated otherwise) for violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA" -42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 et seq.), the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA" - 29 U.S.C. §§ 2601 et seq.) and Pennsylvania common law. As a direct consequence of Defendant's unlawful actions, Plaintiff seeks damages as set forth herein.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

2. This Court has original subject matter jurisdiction over the instant action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1343(a)(4) because it arises under the laws of the United States and

seeks redress for violations of federal laws. There lies supplemental jurisdiction over Plaintiff's state-law claims because they arise out of the same common nucleus of operative facts as Plaintiff's federal claims asserted herein.

- 3. This Court may properly maintain personal jurisdiction over Defendant because its contacts with this state and this judicial district are sufficient for the exercise of jurisdiction over Defendant to comply with traditional notions of fair play and substantial justice, satisfying the standard set forth by the United States Supreme Court in *International Shoe Co. v. Washington*, 326 U.S. 310 (1945) and its progeny.
- 4. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(1) and (b)(2), venue is properly laid in this district because all of the acts and/or omissions giving rise to the claims set forth herein occurred in this judicial district, and Defendant is deemed to reside where it is subjected to personal jurisdiction, rendering Defendanta resident of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

PARTIES

- 5. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
 - 6. Plaintiff is an adult individual, with an address as set forth in the caption.
 - 7. At all relevant times herein, Plaintiff was employed with Defendant.
- 8. Defendant is a metropolitan transportation authority that operates various forms of public transit bus, subway and elevated rail, commuter rail, light rail and electric trolleybus in and around Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- 9. At all times relevant herein, Defendant acted by and through its agents, servants and employees, each of whom acted at all times relevant herein in the course and scope of their employment with and for Defendant.

- 10. Defendant is an employer for purposes of the FMLA and ADA and has and continues to employ over 50 employees per year for the last five years and engages in interstate commerce, specifically the transportation business.
- 11. Plaintiff has administratively exhausted her ADA claims as she timely filed a charge of discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") and brings the instant suit within ninety (90) days of receiving a right to sue letter from the EEOC.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

- 12. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth infull.
- 13. Plaintiff has and continues to suffer from disabilities including but not limited to carpal tunnel syndrome as well as knee and back issues.
- 14. Plaintiff's aforementioned disabilities, at times, severely limit her enjoyment of daily life activities including but not limited to exercising, walking, climbing, working, grasping, lifting, and other life activities.¹
- 15. Plaintiff worked for Defendant for approximately 13 years before her eventual termination in or about January of 2014.
- 16. During all times relevant to this lawsuit, Plaintiff worked for Defendant as a cashier.
- 17. In or about February of 2013, Plaintiff began to suffer from back-related health issues as a result of falling in her bathroom.

¹ While such life activities may be impacted, this paragraph should not be construed to mean Plaintiff is impacted on an every-day basis in this manner. Nor should this paragraph be construed as an exhaustive list of the ways in which Plaintiff is impacted (but rather, provides some examples) by her disabilities.

- 18. In order to care for and treat for her back-related health conditions (as discussed *supra*), Plaintiff took approximately two months off from work (an FMLA-qualifying leave).
- 19. After returning from her aforementioned two-month medical leave, Plaintiff continued to take intermittent time off from work for her aforesaid back condition.
- 20. In or about September of 2013, Plaintiff suffered a work-related injury while working for Defendant.
- 21. More specifically, a cockroach crawled on Plaintiff, which startled her and caused Plaintiff to injure her knee.
- 22. Plaintiff filed a workers' compensation claim in connection with her aforementioned work-related knee injury.
- 23. Following Plaintiff's aforementioned work-related knee injury, Plaintiff could still perform her job well for Defendant; however, she would require an occasional reasonable accommodation in the form of intermittent time off from work.
- 24. In or about November of 2013, Plaintiff filed a separate workers compensation claim, as she was suffering from on-going work related injury (i.e. carpal tunnel syndrome).
- 25. In or about November of 2013, Plaintiff took a brief (approximately 7 days) block medical leave for her carpal tunnel syndrome.
- 26. Between November of 2013 and her termination in January of 2014 (as discussed *supra*), Plaintiff continued to take intermittent (albeit very minimal) time off from work to care for and treat for her aforementioned health conditions.
- 27. In November of 2013, Plaintiff also requested that she be moved to a convalescent booth to better accommodate her disabilities so that she was not consistently using her right hand.

- 28. Defendants' management initially refused to grant Plaintiff's aforementioned request and required her to remain out of work without pay.
- 29. Eventually, Plaintiff's request to be transferred to a different booth was granted, but not before Plaintiff suffered damages as a result of Defendant's initial denial of her reasonable accommodation request.
- 30. Although Plaintiff occasionally took days off from work due to her aforesaid health conditions during the last approximate year of her employment, Defendant's management was not forthcoming with applying any specific leave policy despite requests from Plaintiff.
- 31. For example, during the last approximate year of her employment (while taking time off for her aforementioned health conditions), Plaintiff was not properly advised of her FMLA rights, was often not advised if her qualifying absences were approved or denied under the FMLA, had FMLA-qualifying absences counted against her, and was never advised of how much FMLA-qualifying leave she had remaining despite her requests for the same.
- 32. In or about early summer of 2013, Defendant's management issued Plaintiff written discipline for absences even though the vast majority of Plaintiff's absences were related to her own serious health conditions/disabilities.
- 33. In or about January of 2014, Plaintiff testified in a workers' compensation proceeding related to her aforementioned workers' compensation claims.
- 34. During Plaintiff's workers' compensation proceeding, Plaintiff produced a video showing cockroaches on Defendant's bathroom floor as evidence supporting her workers' compensation claim.

- 35. Approximately one (1) day after participating in the aforementioned workers' compensation hearing, Defendant's management informed Plaintiff that her employment with Defendant was being terminated.
- 36. Plaintiff asked Defendant's management why she was being terminated. In response, Defendant's management simply told Plaintiff to talk to her union without providing any further explanation.
- 37. Plaintiff called her union representative to inquire as to the reason for her termination, but Plaintiff was told that Defendant had not provided the union with a reason for her termination.
- 38. Plaintiff was terminated one (1) day after participating in a workers' compensation hearing without any prior warning or reasonable explanation.
- 39. Plaintiff had experienced continuing hostility towards her disabilities and her needs for leave throughout the approximate one (1) year period prior to her termination, as she was not properly informed of her FMLA or ADA rights, refused accommodations, and given pretextual discipline for her protected absences.
- 40. Plaintiff believes and therefore avers that she was terminated because of her disabilities, her workers' compensation claim, and/or her requests for reasonable accommodations.

COUNT I

<u>Violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA", as amended)</u> ([1] Discrimination; [2] Failure to Accommodate; [3] Retaliation; [4] Hostile Work Environment)

41. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.

- 42. Plaintiff properly exhausted her administrative remedies before proceeding in this Court for violations of the ADA by timely filing a Charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") and by filing the instant Complaint within 90 days of receiving a notice of case closure and/or right-to-sue letter.
- 43. Plaintiff experienced hostility towards her requests for time off from work due to her disabilities and was denied basic information regarding her medical leaves.
- 44. Plaintiff was issued discipline based on absences although the majority of her absences were related to her disabilities suggesting both a discriminatory animus towards her disabilities and a failure to provide a reasonable accommodation in the form of time off from work.
- 45. Plaintiff believes and therefore avers that she was terminated due to her [1] actual disabilities and/or perceived disabilities; [2] her record of impairment; and/or [3] requests for reasonable accommodations.
- 46. Plaintiff was also subjected to a hostile work environment during her period of employment due to her disabilities and/or requests for accommodations through disparate treatment, pretextual admonishment, and demeaning and/or discriminatory treatment towards her.
- 47. Defendants failed to accommodate Plaintiff's disabilities by [1] failing to initially transfer her to a booth wherein she did not have to consistently use her right hand; and [2] disciplining her and/or eventually terminating her for taking time off to care for and treat for her aforementioned health conditions.
- 48. These actions as aforesaid constitute unlawful discrimination, retaliation, and failure to accommodate under the ADA.

COUNT II <u>Violation of the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA")</u> (Interference & Retaliation)

- 49. The foregoing paragraphs are incorporated herein in their entirety as if set forth in full.
- 50. Plaintiff was an eligible employee under the definitional terms of the Family and Medical Leave Act, 29 U.S.C. § 2611(2)(a)(i)(ii).
- 51. Plaintiff requested both block and intermittent leave from Defendant, her employer, with whom she had been employed for at least twelve (12) months pursuant to the requirements of 29 U.S.C.A. § 2611(2)(A)(i).
- 52. Plaintiff had at least 1,250 hours of service with Defendant during the prior twelve (12) months.
- 53. Defendant is engaged in an industry affecting commerce and employs fifty (50) or more employees for each working day during each of the twenty (20) or more calendar work weeks in the current or proceeding calendar year, pursuant to 29 U.S.C.A. § 2611(4)(A)(i).
- 54. Plaintiff was entitled to receive leave pursuant to 29 U.S.C.A. § 2612 (a)(1) and for a total of twelve (12) work weeks of leave due to her own serious health conditions.
- 55. Plaintiff was discouraged from taking FMLA leave and experienced hostility from management as a result of taking FMLA leave by not properly informing Plaintiff of her rights under the FMLA and by issuing Plaintiff discipline for absences that should have been qualified as FMLA days.
- 56. Defendant committed interference and retaliation violations of the FMLA by discouraging Plaintiff from taking FMLA-qualifying leave and by terminating Plaintiff: (1) for requesting and/or exercising her FMLA rights and/or for taking FMLA-qualifying leave; (2) by

considering Plaintiff's FMLA leave needs; (3) to dissuade Plaintiff and/or other employees from utilizing FMLA leave; and (4) to prevent her from taking further FMLA-qualifying leave in the future.

57. These actions as aforesaid constitute unlawful interference and retaliation under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

COUNT III <u>Violation of the Pennsylvania Common Law</u> (Public Policy Violation - Workers' Compensation Retaliation)

- 58. The averments of the foregoing paragraphs are hereby incorporated by referenceas if set forth fully herein.
- 59. It is against this Commonwealth's public policy for an employee to be terminated in retaliation for filing or attempting to file a workers' compensation claim.
- 60. Plaintiff was terminated approximately one(1) day after participating in a hearing in connection with her workers' compensation claim.
- 61. Due to the exceedingly close time between when Plaintiff participated in her workers' compensation hearing and when she was terminated, Plaintiff believes that she was terminated in retaliation for filing and attempting to prove said claim.
- 62. These actions as aforesaid constitute wrongful termination in Pennsylvania. *See Shick v. Shirey*, 552 Pa. 590, 716 A.2d 1231 (1997).

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays that this Court enter an Order providing that:

A. Defendant is to compensate Plaintiff, reimburse Plaintiff, and make Plaintiff whole for any and all pay and benefits Plaintiff would have received had it not been for Defendant's illegal actions, including but not limited to back pay, front pay, salary, pay increases, bonuses, insurance, benefits, training, promotions, reinstatement, and seniority.

Plaintiff is to be awarded punitive and/or liquidated damages, as permitted by applicable law, in an amount believed by the Court or trier of fact to be appropriate to punish

Defendant for its willful, deliberate, malicious and outrageous conduct and to deter Defendant or

other employers from engaging in such misconduct in the future;

C. Plaintiff is to be accorded other equitable and legal relief as the Court deems just,

proper, and appropriate (including but not limited to damages for emotional distress / pain and

suffering);

Dated: June 22, 2015

B.

D. Plaintiff is to be awarded the costs and expenses of this action and reasonable

attorney's fees as provided by applicable federal and state law.

Respectfully submitted,

KARPF, KARPF & CERUTTI, P.C.

By:

Ari R. Karpf, Esq. 3331 Street Road

Two Greenwood Square, Suite 128

Bensalem, PA 19020

(215) 639-0801

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

CASE MANAGEMENT TRACK DESIGNATION FORM

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(b) Social Security – C and Human Servic	Cases requesting review es denying plaintiff Soc	of a decision of the Secretary of Health ial Security Benefits.	()
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6/22/2015	Ari R. Karpf	Plaintiff	
Date	Attorney-at-	law Attorney for	***************************************
(215) 639-0801	(215) 639-4970	0 akarpf@karpf-law.com	1

FAX Number

E-Mail Address

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Telephone

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA — DESIGNATION FORM to assignment to appropriate calendar.	be used by counsel to indicate the ca	tegory of the case for the	purpose of
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Address of Defendant: 1234 Market Street, 5th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 1	9107		****
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ARBITRATION CERTI (Check Appropriate Cat Ari R. Karpf , counsel of record do hereby certify	egary)		
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*>JS 44 (Rev. 12/07, NJ 5/08)

CIVIL COVER SHEET

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE REVERSE OF THE FORM.)

I. (a) PLAINTIFFS				DEFENDANT	rs						
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(b) County of Residen				County of Residen	ce of F	irst L	isted	Defendant	Philadelph	ia	,
(c) Attorney's (Firm N Karpf, Karpf & C Two Greenwood PA 19020, (215)	Square, Suite 12	Street Road, 28, Bensalem,			VD INV			ATION CASES, L	USE THE LOCA	lon oi	ТНВ
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